

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

**PROTECTIVE COVER FOR FIBER CABLE REELS AND METHOD OF
PROTECTING SAME**

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Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates generally to the use of fiber cable reels in the installation of fiber routes in telecommunications fiber optic cable networks. More particularly, the present invention is an apparatus and method for protecting stored fiber cable reels from the elements.

Background of the Invention

[0002] Fiber cables are shipped to various storage yards around the country as new fiber routes are installed. Those reels often must stand out in the open air for years before they are used by the installation crews. In addition, spare restoration reels are stored out in the open air as well. Those reels are placed around the country and are used in the event of a cable failure.

[0003] Fiber cable reels will typically have up to 40,000 feet of fiber (up to 800 fiber count). Each reel of cable therefore represents a substantial investment by the utility company owning the cable stock.

[0004] The reels are most commonly constructed of wood, although plastic and steel reels are known. The reels have flanges on each end protruding from a central spool. An arbor hole extends through the spool along its axis. The fiber cable is wrapped on the spool between the flanges in an even manner, so the diameter of the outside circumferential surface of the fiber cable is substantially constant between the flanges.

[0005] The stored reels are often subjected to very high temperatures (120 degrees F) and to very low temperatures (-20 to -30 degrees F). That harsh environment may degrade the transmission performance and longevity of the fiber cable, and may even destroy the cable. Spare fiber reels are therefore sometimes stored under cover of buildings to protect the fiber from those extremes of temperature, resulting in substantial additional costs. Often, such storage is not available, especially during the installation of fiber routes.

[0006] Optical fiber cable manufacturers will sometimes ship the fiber cable with a plastic or cardboard cover. That cover does not stand up to harsh weather and high temperatures, and generally does little to protect the fiber cable from the effects of temperature.

[0007] There is therefore presently a need for device and a method for protecting bulk fiber cable stored on reels. The device should preferably be reusable, and should stand up to outdoor conditions as well as protect the fiber optic cable from outdoor temperature extremes. To the inventors' knowledge, there is currently no such apparatus or method currently employed to satisfactorily accomplish that task.

Summary of the Invention

[0008] The present invention addresses the needs described above by providing, in one embodiment, a protective cover for optical fiber cable stored on a fiber cable reel. The protective cover includes an elongate flexible wrapping member having a length sufficient to extend substantially around an outer circumference of the optical fiber cable. A plurality of insulating members are disposed along the wrapping member. The

insulating members being arranged in proximity to each other to form an insulating region. A fastening member is arranged for fastening the wrapping member around the outer circumference of the optical fiber cable.

[0009] The flexible wrapping member may be constructed of fabric, and the fabric may be nylon. The wrapping member may include a plurality of pockets, in which case the insulating members are disposed within the pockets. The long sides of the pockets may overlap long sides of adjacent pockets; alternatively, the long sides of the pockets may substantially abut long sides of adjacent pockets.

[0010] The insulating members may be elongate in shape and have a length substantially perpendicular to the length of the wrapping member. The insulating members may be bonded to the wrapping member. The insulating members may be ceramic blocks.

[0011] The wrapping member may have a width sufficiently narrow to be placed between flanges of the fiber cable reel. Alternatively, the wrapping member may be wide enough to be placed over the flanges.

[0012] The insulating members may be removable from the wrapping member. The fastening member may be a cinch strap attached to the wrapping member and extending the length of the wrapping member.

[0013] In another embodiment of the invention, a method is provided for protecting an optical fiber cable stored on a fiber cable reel. The method includes the step of wrapping a protective cover around an outer circumference of the optical fiber cable. The protective cover includes an elongate wrapping member having a plurality of

pockets containing ceramic insulating members. The method also includes the step of fastening the protective cover around the circumference of the optical fiber cable.

[0014] The step of wrapping the protective cover around an outer circumference of the cable may include placing the cover between flanges of the fiber cable reel, or may alternatively include placing the cover over circumferences of flanges of the fiber cable reel. The step of fastening the protective cover around the circumference of the optical fiber cable may include cinching at least one strap around the cover.

[0015] The pockets may be elongate in shape and have a length substantially perpendicular to the length of the wrapping member. The pockets may overlap.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0016] FIG. 1 is a view of an fiber optical cable reel with a protective cover according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0017] FIG. 2 is a view of the protective cover of FIG. 1 in an uninstalled condition.

[0018] FIGS. 3a and 3b are sectional views of the reel and protective cover of FIG. 1 through section III-III, according to two different embodiments of the invention.

[0019] FIG. 4 is a sectional view of the protective cover of the invention in an uninstalled condition, according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0020] FIG. 5 is a sectional view of the protective cover of the invention in an uninstalled condition, according to another embodiment of the invention.

Description of the Invention

[0021] An apparatus protecting fiber optic cable stored on a reel according to the present invention is shown in FIG. 1. A cable storage reel 110 includes supports 120 radiating from a central hub. An arbor hole 125 extends through the central hub and accepts an arbor with arbor supports 130 for storage and for spooling cable. Flanges 115 extend radially outward from a spool 105 at both ends of the spool. Fiber cable (not shown) is wrapped on the spool 105 between the flanges 115.

[0022] A protective shroud or cover 135 is installed over the fiber cable to prevent high and low temperatures from directly striking the fiber cable. The protective shroud 135 covers the area of the fiber cable that is exposed to ambient conditions. That area is the outer circumference of the fiber cable as it is wrapped on the cable reel.

[0023] A protective cover 200 is shown in an uninstalled condition in FIG. 2. The cover 200 includes a weather resistant wrapping member 210 that can be draped around the fiber reel. The wrapping member is elongate in shape, and has a plurality of insulating members 215 disposed along the wrapping member 210. The insulating members 215 are preferably elongate and have a long axis that is perpendicular to the long axis of the wrapping member. The wrapping member is flexible, and may be composed of a woven or non-woven fabric material or another flexible sheet material such as Mylar[®] film. In a preferred embodiment, a heavy gauge nylon fabric is used.

[0024] Fastening members 220a-220d extend from the ends of the wrapping member for attaching the wrapping to the fiber cable or reel. The fastening members may be a webbing material such as nylon strapping, having ratcheting strapping clamps or other tie-down devices known in the art. Alternatively, steel strapping may be used.

The fastening members 220a-220d may be attached individually at each end of the wrapping member, as shown in FIG. 2, in which case the wrapping member is put in tension as the fastening members are tightened. Alternatively, the fastening members may extend completely around the circumference of the wrapping member and compress the wrapping member and insulating members radially inward when tightened.

[0025] In a preferred embodiment, the insulating members 215 are ceramic tiles that are placed along the wrapping member 210. The tiles serve as a protector of the fiber cable, and will not allow direct sunlight strike the fiber cable. The high temperatures that are normally present when a reel is stored out in the open are not allowed to transfer to the fiber cable underneath the ceramic tiles and wrapping member. Similarly, cold temperatures also are not transferred to the fiber cable. The ceramic tiles used in the preferred embodiment are similar to those used throughout the aerospace industry to protect space craft from high/low temperatures. The ceramic tiles comprise clay, flint and/or feldspar molded and fired into a block of material that resists the transfer of heat or cold to material underneath it.

[0026] The insulating members 215 may be attached to the wrapping member in any appropriate manner. For example, the insulating members may be bonded to the wrapping member 210 using a suitable adhesive. In a currently preferred embodiment, the insulating members 215 are inserted in pockets provided for that purpose in the wrapping member. The pockets may then be permanently closed, for example, by stitching or bonding, or the insulating members may be made removable for repair or replacement. In that case, the pockets may have folding covers, or may be closeable by zipper or hook-and-loop closure.

[0027] A sectional view through a fiber cable reel 310 having a protective cover 350 is shown in FIG. 3a to illustrate one embodiment of the invention. A coil of fiber optic cable 330 has been wrapped on a spool 320 between flanges 325. The reel may be mounted on an arbor (not shown) placed through a central arbor hole 315.

[0028] The protective cover 350 of the invention is placed directly over the outer circumferential surface 332 of the coil of fiber cable 330. Because the outer surface 332 of the spooled fiber cable is radially inside the outer edge of the flanges 325, the protective cover 350 of the invention must have a width small enough to fit between the flanges 325 in order to be placed directly over the fiber cable. Such an arrangement is advantageous because the flange outer edges are free for rolling on the ground without harming the protective cover.

[0029] Another embodiment of the invention is shown in FIG. 3b, in which like elements have like numbering as in FIG. 3a. The protective cover 360 of FIG. 3b extends over the outer edge of the flanges 325 and rests on those outer edges. The width of the cover 360 must therefore be sufficiently long to span the flanges 325. Such an arrangement is advantageous in that the cover 360 may be provided with special interfacing structure (not shown) for attaching to the outer edge of the flange, such as a tongue and groove arrangement. Further, there is no minimum clearance required for the protector between the outer circumferential surface 332 of the cable coil and the outer edge of the flange 325.

[0030] An arrangement of a wrapping member 410 having pockets 415 for the insulating members 420 is shown in sectional view in FIG. 4. In that embodiment of the invention, the insulating members 420 overlap by a distance 440 due to the particular

arrangement of the pockets in the wrapping member. The insulating members 420 form an insulating region 460. By permitting the insulating members to overlap, the insulating region 460 has little or no area between the insulating members for extreme ambient heat to be conducted in to the fiber cable, or for heat to be conducted out under extreme cold conditions.

[0031] A continuous fastening member 425 and cinching buckle 430 are provided to attach the protective cover around the fiber optic cable. In the presently described embodiment, care must be taken in choosing a material and material thickness for the wrapping member 410 in order to protect the insulating members 420 from adjacent insulating members at the overlap points.

[0032] An embodiment of the invention having a side-by-side arrangement of insulating members is shown in FIG. 5. The wrapping member 510 has non-overlapping pockets 515 for the insulating members 520. The insulating members 520 form an insulating region 560. In that embodiment, the insulating members are allowed to lie “flat” against the cable coil, reducing stress on the insulating members when the fastening member 525 is tightened with the cinching buckle 530.

[0033] The foregoing Detailed Description is to be understood as being in every respect illustrative and exemplary, but not restrictive, and the scope of the invention disclosed herein is not to be determined from the Detailed Description, but rather from the claims as interpreted according to the full breadth permitted by the patent laws. For example, while the system is described primarily in connection with the protection of optical fiber cables, the method and apparatus of the invention may also be used to protect other delicate conveyances that are stored on reels, such as underwater cable, etc..

It is to be understood that the embodiments shown and described herein are only illustrative of the principles of the present invention and that various modifications may be implemented by those skilled in the art without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention.